

FIXING APPARATUS AND IMAGE-FORMING DEVICE

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

This invention relates to a fixing apparatus having
5 an anti-offset construction and an image-forming device that
uses the fixing apparatus.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Some of the copiers, facsimiles, printers, printing
10 presses or other image-forming devices utilize the method
of electrophotography for forming images.

In electrophotography, an electrostatic latent image
borne on a photoreceptor is subjected to visible image
processing using a developer. The photoreceptor is also
15 called a latent image bearing body that bears a latent image.
The developer is, for example, a toner.

There are two types of developers. That is, a
one-component type developer and a two-component type
developer. The one-component type developer is itself
20 endowed with electrostatic and electromagnetic properties
and is transferred and adhered to the electrostatic latent
image. On the other hand, the two-component type developer
contains two distinct constituents, a toner and a carrier.
Recently, both of the developers are made finer and finer
25 to improve the image quality, dot reproducibility and

sharpness.

The transfer unit transfers the visible image, namely the toner-developed image borne on the photoreceptor onto a medium. After such transfer, the image on the medium is 5 fixed.

In an example of the fixing process, a single roller is set in direct contact with the toner-covered medium. The heat and pressure of the roller heats up and melts the toner. As a result, the toner penetrates into the medium. This 10 method is called a thermal roller fixing system.

The thermal roller fixing system includes a fixing roller with a built-in heat source and a pressure roller provided opposite to the fixing roller. The surface of the fixing roller is covered with a medium release layer to 15 prevent offset. This medium release layer is made of a medium release lubricant such as Teflon (registered trademark). The surface of the pressure roller is covered with an elastic layer made of silicone rubber.

The pressure roller is pressure fit to the fixing roller. 20 The pressure roller has its elastic layer so deformed as to imitate the peripheral profile of the fixing roller. The combination of the pressure roller and the fixing roller constitutes a fixing nip.

The thermal roller fixing system is advantageous as 25 compared to a belt-using fixing system. The reasons are

as follows. That is, thermal roller fixing system very effectively makes use of the working of heat and pressure, and the fixing efficiency in the thermal roller fixing system is high. As a result, the thermal roller fixing system is 5 being preferably used in image formation over the belt-using fixing system.

As explained above, when the toner is finer it improves the dot reproducibility and sharpness, therefore it is advantageous to use a finer toner. A finer toner in which 10 a volume mean grain size is between 5 through 10 micrometers is known. However, during the manufacture of a toner having above-mentioned grain size, toner particles having still finer size are inadvertently generated in great number. The grain size of such toner particles is below 5 micrometers 15 and they account for 60 through 80 number percent in ratio. Such toner particles will be collectively called micro-fine toner for convenience sake.

It is disadvantageous for the image-forming devices if the ratio of the micro-fine toner increases. Therefore, 20 grain size of the toner is so adjusted that the micro-fine toner accounts for about 10 number percent in ratio.

However, there is an increased demand for lower costs and resource conservation involving toner. The manufacturing process becomes complicated if a toner having 25 almost uniform grain size is to be manufactured by removing

micro-fine toner from the toner. This also increases the manufacturing cost. Moreover, the micro-fine toner separated from the toner is generally disposed so that there is a loss of resources. As a result, there is a growing 5 demand that, it should become possible to use a toner as it is even if the micro-fine toner is mixed in it in a specific ratio. Concretely, there is a growing demand that, a toner having a volume mean grain size of from 5 through 10 micrometers and a grain size not larger than 5 micrometers 10 accounting for 60 through 80 number percent can be used in the image-forming devices. Hereafter such a toner will be called a fine toner.

If a visible image is formed using a finer toner that contains micro-fine toner, the toner is liable to become 15 liberated under the influence of static electricity. In the image-forming devices, the fixing roller and the pressure roller are interlocked so as to rotate during the image forming operation. As a result of friction between the rollers, there is generated an electrical charge of the order 20 of 0 through minus 5KV. During the image forming operation, the toner is fixed to the medium only because of the static electric force. However, since there is the electrical charge generated due to friction between the rollers, the toner fixed to the medium gets separated from the medium, 25 becomes airborne, and finally gets adhered to the fixing

roller. Take an example of a digital copier where a toner-developed visible image is negatively charged at a low value and the visible image transferred on the medium is attracted and adhered thereto by the positive 5 electrostatic force induced onto the medium side.

As explained above, the surface of the pressure roller in the fixing apparatus is provided with a Teflon or other insulating layer. The Teflon insulator constitutes an extensive, negatively charged portion for which very reason, 10 on entering the fixing apparatus, the toner-developed visible image is subject to the repulsion between itself and the large negative electrostatic force of the pressure roller. Should the visible image be thereby repulsed and get adhered onto the fixing roller, offset ensues.

15 Occurrence of this phenomenon is not limited to the finer toner alone. Such phenomenon is observed in conventional toner with a volume mean grain size not falling below 20 micrometers. Moreover, it is also noticed in the toners with the volume mean grain size reduced to around 20 5 through 10 micrometers and from which micro-fine toner has been removed.

It has already been confirmed that offset can be rendered inconspicuous if the surface resistivity of the pressure roller is made as lower as ranging from 1×10^{10} 25 through $1 \times 10^{12} \Omega/m$, and the ratio of micro-fine toner is

low compared to conventional toner. However, it was confirmed with experiments that, offset did occur in case of the finer toner, despite the surface resistivity of the pressure roller having been lowered to around 1×10^{10} through 5 $1 \times 10^{12} \Omega/\text{m}$.

On the other hand, in order to prevent this offset, a technique of rendering the pressure roller surface electroconductive (which in terms of surface resistivity being around 1×10^2 through $1 \times 10^4 \Omega/\text{m}$) has often been 10 attempted.

In the case of conventional toner with a volume mean grain size of not less than 20 micrometers, the toner itself with substantial weight is rendered electroconductive and as the toner enters the fixing apparatus the electric charge 15 initiates an electrostatic discharge, during which period the toner retains its own weight and so offset is reduced. By contrast, for finer toner, as soon as a visible image enters the fixing apparatus, the visible image is electrically shocked by the abrupt discharge of electric 20 charges between the visible image on the medium and the pressure roller positioned just behind the medium. Because of this electric shock, the toner (micro-fine toner, particularly) on the image surface becomes liberated towards the fixing roller, hence offset occurs as a result. These 25 phenomena get significant when use is made of the kind of

paper (medium) having high resistivity that tends to boost the amount of electrostatic charge (including the case as at a second side fixing where the moisture content of the medium is more or less found lost in the fixing step of a 5 first side in a two-sided copying mode).

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The object of this invention is to provide both a fixing apparatus which is configured such that as fine-toner 10 developed image, namely a visible image in an electrostatic state enters the fixing apparatus, any change in the electrostatic state is curbed so as to prevent offset from resulting, and an image-forming device that uses the fixing apparatus.

15 The fixing apparatus and the image-forming device according to the present invention comprises a transfer unit that obtains a visible image from an electrostatic latent image formed on a latent image bearing body using a developer and transfers the visible image onto a medium, and a fixing 20 roller and a pressure roller, positioned opposite to each other with a transfer pass for the medium therebetween, that fix the visible image on the medium. The developer contains a toner having a volume mean grain size of from 5 to 10 micrometers and a grain size not larger than 5 micrometers 25 accounting for 60 through 80 number percent. The surface

resistivity of the pressure roller is between 1×10^7 through 1×10^{10} Ω/m .

Other objects and features of this invention will become apparent from the following description with 5 reference to the accompanying drawings.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Fig. 1 is a schematic drawing of an example of the image-forming device according to an embodiment of this 10 invention,

Fig. 2 a schematic drawing of the main configuration of the fixing apparatus used in the image-forming device shown in Fig. 1, and

Fig. 3 shows an experimental result of surface 15 resistivity and the state of occurrence of offset.

DETAILED DESCRIPTIONS

Embodiments of the fixing apparatus and the image-forming device according to this invention will be 20 explained in detail below with reference made to the accompanying drawings.

Fig. 1 is a schematic drawing of the image-forming device installed with the fixing apparatus according to an embodiment of this invention. The image-forming device 25 shown schematically is a copier capable of forming

electrostatic latent images by exposure light. As a matter of course, according to this invention, not only a copier but also a printer, facsimile or a printing press become the target of this image-forming device.

5 In Fig. 1, the copier 1 is equipped with a photoreceptor drum 2 as a latent image bearing body. Around the photoreceptor drum 2 is laid out a range of equipment from an electrostatic charger 3, an exposure device 4, a developing device 5, a transfer device 6 to a cleaning device
10 7 that together execute image formation processing in the rotational process.

15 In the copier 1, on completion of uniform electrostatic charging by the electrostatic charger 3, an electrostatic latent image is formed on the photoreceptor drum 5 through the exposure device 4, the electrostatic latent image being then put to a visible image processing using the toner that the developing device 5 supplies. On being thus visible image-processed by the developing device 5, the toner-developed visible image on the photoreceptor drum 2
20 is transferred through the transfer device 6 onto the medium paid out from a non-illustrated feeding device. After the transfer operation, the photoreceptor drum 2 is cleaned of non-transferred toner or residual electric charge by the cleaning device 7, and subjected to uniform electrostatic charging by the electrostatic charger 3 before the
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photoreceptor stands by for image formation.

The developer for use in the developing device 5 has a volume mean grain size of from 5 to 10 micrometers and a grain size not larger than 5 micrometers accounting for 5 60 through 80 number percent. The toner is composed of resin constituents, colorants, wax constituents, and inorganic particulates and is manufactured by pulverization or a polymerization.

For resin constituents, any known resins may be used 10 singly or in combination, including the following: styrene, poly- α -stilstyrene, styrene-chlorostyrene copolymer, styrene-propylene copolymer, styrene-butadiene copolymer, styrene-vinyl chloride copolymer, styrene-vinyl acetate copolymer, styrene-maleic acid copolymer, styrene-acrylic 15 ester copolymer, styrene-methacrylic acid ester copolymer, styrene- α -chloroacrylic methyl copolymer, styrene-acrylonitrile-acrylic ester copolymer and other styrene resins (polymers or copolymers containing styrene or styrene substitution product), polyester resin, epoxy 20 resin, vinyl chloride resin, rosin modified maleic acid resin, phenol resin, polyethylene resin, polyester resin, polypropylene resin, petroleum resin, polyurethane resin, ketone resin, ethylene-ethylacrylate copolymer, xylene resin, and polyvinyl butyral.

25 For the colorant, a selection is made from a known

group comprising carbon black, lampblack, iron black, ultramarine blue, nigrosine dye, aniline blue, chalco oil blue, oil black, and azo oil black but the selection is not particularly limited thereto.

5 The wax constituent may be selected from a known group comprising a carnauba wax, rice wax, and synthetic ester wax but the selection is not particularly limited thereto.

 The inorganic particulates are selected from a known group comprising silica and titanium oxide particulates.

10 Concerning the medium with a toner-developed visible image transferred on it, the medium is sent down the carrier pass extended from the transfer point towards the non-illustrated delivery section, the visible image being fixed by the fixing apparatus 8 disposed on the carrier pass.

15 For the fixing apparatus 8, the fixing roller 8A with a built-in heat source A1 (see Fig. 2) and the pressure roller 8B are set opposed to each other with the carrier pass for the medium sandwiched between them such that the heat and pressure of the rollers heats up and melts the toner, which 20 in turn penetrates into the medium in a method called a thermal roller fixing system.

 Fig. 2 is a detail drawing of the fixing apparatus 8. The fixing roller 8A comprises the roller core 8A2 that consists of a thermal conductor of aluminum, iron, stainless 25 steel or brass with a built-in heat source 8A1. The roller

surface is coated with an anti-offset layer 8A3 using a medium releasing lubricant composed of tetrafluoroethylene-perfluoro alkylvinyl ether (PFA), polytetrafluoroethylene (PTFE) and/or other ingredients.

5 The fixing roller 8A is set to 150 through 200 degrees centigrade monitored by a non-illustrated temperature detecting sensor.

Concerning the pressure roller 8B, the surface of the roller metal core 8B1 is coated with an insulating layer 10 8B2 of silicone rubber, with the roller surface layer overlaid with a coating 8B3 of tetrafluoroethylene-perfluoro alkylvinyl ether (PFA).

Of the surface region of the pressure roller 8B, the coated layer 8B3 contains an electroconductive agent of 15 spherical carbon, the percentage composition of the electroconductive agent being controlled at a quantitative level where the following values can be obtained as the surface resistivity of the pressure roller 8B. Namely, the percentage composition of the electroconductive agent is 20 conditional on the surface resistivity of the pressure roller being less than $1 \times 10^{10} \Omega/m$ at a measuring voltage of 500V and not less than $1 \times 10^7 \Omega/m$ at 10V.

As concerns the surface resistivity of the pressure roller 8B, measurements are taken using "Yushi 25 Denshi"-manufactured "Hi-Rester IP", under the measuring

voltage condition of 500V and 10V.

In those measurements, given such a high measuring voltage as 500V, measurements can be made of a sample without problems at a surface resistivity of 1×10^9 through $1 \times 5 \times 10^{11} \Omega/m$ or thereabouts, but at 1×10^5 through $1 \times 10^7 \Omega/m$ or thereabouts, it is difficult to obtain correct values of the sample. On the other hand, given a measuring voltage of 10V, measurements can be made without problems if and when the surface resistivity is 1×10^5 through $1 \times 10^8 \Omega/m$ or thereabouts, but it gets difficult to obtain correct values of the sample. Because of this, in order to obtain correct values of the sample at surface resistivity of 1×10^7 through $1 \times 10^{10} \Omega/m$ or thereabouts, measurements are taken in both ways.

With the surface resistance of the pressure roller 8B set as above, the electrostatic voltage that arises when the pressure roller rotates in contact with the fixing roller 8A is maintained at around 0 through minus 1KV, a level of voltage low compared to a conventional level of 0 through minus 5KV. When the developer used is measured in the blow-off method for a toner to carrier mixing ratio (TC) and for the amount of electrostatic charge (Q/M), the amount of electrostatic charge (Q/M) stands at 40 through 50 micro C/g and the mixing ratio (TC) at 3 through 5 weight percent.

In this embodiment, configured as it is as above, when

the fixing roller 8A is driven by a non-illustrated driving unit, the pressure roller that constitutes a fixing nip in pressure-fit contact with the fixing roller 8A interlocks via frictional force and rotates at constant velocity.

5 The pressure roller 8B that rotates interlocked with the fixing roller 8A may cause electrostatic charge to arise at the roller surface layer as a result of frictional contact, but the surface resistance of the coated layer 8B3 on the surface layer of the pressure roller relieves the 10 electrostatic charge, so much so that the electrostatic charge can be curbed to around 0 through minus 1KV level, which is low compared to a conventional level of 0 through 5KV. When a medium bearing a toner-developed visible image enters the fixing nip portion, accordingly, electrostatic 15 repulsion is relieved, the electrostatic repulsion, that is, which lies between the electrostatically adsorbed toner on the medium, namely the negatively charged toner on one hand, and the coated layer 8B3 on the pressure roller 8B on the other. This is how the toner on the medium is largely 20 prevented from scattering in the direction of the fixing roller 8A.

 The pressure roller 8B has an insulating layer 8B2 provided between the coated layer 8B3 on the surface layer and the roller core 8B1, because of the provision of which 25 the electrostatic charge occurring in the coated layer 8B3

is precluded from abruptly discharging towards the roller core 8B1 and hence the electrostatic potential is maintained. This also retrains the likelihood of the toner being readily liberated, and scattering towards the fixing roller 8A, under 5 the impact of turbulence of electrostatic force between toner and the coated layer of the pressure roller in the event of abrupt electric charge initiating a discharge. As a result, it is possible to create the status where both the scattering of toner towards the fixing roller 8A and an offset 10 entailing barely occur. Also preventable in positive terms are offset-caused spoiling and other defective images.

The inventor et al used the pressure roller 8B set to the surface resistivity and experimented on the state of occurrence of offset, the result of which is shown in 15 Fig. 3.

The toners used in the experiment come in three types, namely finer non-uniform toner of this invention (a toner having a volume mean grain size of from 5 to 10 micrometers and a grain size not larger than 5 micrometers accounting 20 for 60 through 80 number percent), a finer uniform toner (a toner having a volume mean grain size of 5 through 10 micrometers and that contains a micro-fine toner accounting for 20 through 40 number percent because of execution of an elimination process, and a coarse toner (with a volume 25 mean grain size of not less than 20 micrometers), with the

results of experimental off-setting evaluated in four grades of excellent, good, ordinary, and bad. The surface resistivity of the pressure roll is measured in units of 10 powers up to and including 10^5 through 10^{11} Ω/m (the 5 experiment being made with reference to 10^{13} Ω/m also).

In the case of the coarse toner, unless an insulated pressure roller is used, restraining effects on offset are expected to as far an extent as electroconductivity. Given a set mean grain size of not less than 20 micrometers, the 10 grain size of the toner powder mostly ranges between 5 and 20 micrometers or thereabouts even in the presence of toner powders not larger than 20 micrometers, which seems to mean that the micro-fine toner so small as 5 micrometers and below are practically nonexistent.

15 In the case of the finer uniform toner, restraining effects on offset are obtained at a surface resistivity of $10^{11} \Omega/m$. However, as the pressure roller surface approaches quite close to electroconductivity, offset becomes evident as soon as the toner-bearing medium enters the fixing 20 apparatus.

In the case of the finer non-uniform toner, as earlier addressed as a task, it seems that as soon as the medium with toner-developed visible image on it enters the fixing apparatus, electric charge initiates an abrupt discharge 25 between the toner-developed visible image and the pressure

roller disposed on the back side of the medium, with the resultant shock transmitted to the toner on the image plane to liberate the toner towards the fixing roller in a phenomenon called offset. In the case of the finer uniform 5 toner where micro-fine toner has been eliminated, however, the toner remains practical in service at a surface resistivity of 10^5 through 10^6 Ω/m .

In case of the finer non-uniform toner of this invention, the effect of preventing offset is observable only within 10 an extremely narrow range of 10^7 through 10^{10} Ω/m , and at 10^5 through 10^6 Ω/m particularly, a large amount of offset is confirmed no sooner has the medium entered the fixing apparatus.

According to the present invention, when the finer 15 non-uniform toner is used, resistance property is imparted to the toner as a electrostatic propensity to an extent such that the toner is thereby prevented from scattering, a preventive measure whereby the toner is precluded from causing an offset in the direction of the fixing roller. 20 This is how offset-induced image failure is prevented from occurring.

Moreover, since the resistance property of the pressure roller surface layer is held in a relieved status by carbon, it is possible to inhibit the toner scattering 25 towards the fixing roller and prevent offset from entailing.

In addition, since an insulating layer is laid between the surface layer of the pressure roller and the roller core, it is possible to prevent changes in the state of toner adhesion from occurring under the impact of an abrupt 5 discharge of electrostatic charge, without changing the electrostatic property of the surface layer.

The present document incorporates by reference the entire contents of Japanese priority documents, 2001-168335 filed in Japan on June 4, 2001, 2001-191709 filed in Japan 10 on June 25, 2001, and 2002-131238 filed in Japan on May 7, 2002.

Although the invention has been described with respect to a specific embodiment for a complete and clear disclosure, the appended claims are not to be thus limited but are to 15 be construed as embodying all modifications and alternative constructions that may occur to one skilled in the art which fairly fall within the basic teaching herein set forth.